

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS

Hearing Date: March 4, 2021 8:00 AM

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COMMENTS FOR: Texas Secretary of State

Becki Smith
self, artist
Driftwood, TX

We need universal voter registration and simple, easy, mail in AND electronic voting opportunities. We need to STOP gerrymandering districts immediately.

Dorothy Bynum
Self- retired
Woodcreek, TX

I firmly believe that we must do our utmost to encourage and enable all Texas citizens the opportunity to vote. It will be a disgrace if our great state continues to suppress votes in any way.

Gina Biondo
Self
Houston, TX

VDVRs serve an important function in helping those eligible to vote register to do so. Prohibiting VDVRs would unfairly target apartment dwellers and other renters who do not know that they need to turn re-register at their new address when they move. We also need same day registration. I watched a homeless veteran get turned away from voting because he didn't realize his registration had expired. He served the country; the least we can do is give him his voice. Additionally, all counties should have multiple drive through ballot drops for those using mail-in ballots based on the size of the county. Voting is a right under the U.S. Constitution. Please make it easier to do so.

Brenda and Ralph McGahagin
selves and the citizens of Texas, Registered Dietitian (Brenda)
Austin, TX

Dear Texas House Elections Committee Members,

We are writing to request you consider and support the following options to allow more Texans to have a voice in shaping the Government and the programs that affect them and their family's lives each day.

At this time Texas allows Polling Place Voting, Early Voting, Absentee Voting With Excuse, Provisional Voting, Overseas Absentee Voting, Military Absentee Voting.

We support and request several options be allowed in Texas: Election Day (Same Day) Voter Registration, Absentee Voting without excuse, All Mail Voting.

We request individuals of 16 years and above be allowed to vote.

We request offenders and ex offenders be allowed to vote. We request a verifiable system (paper ballots) to verify the vote and maintain integrity. We request that all citizens of Texas find voting as smooth and stress free as possible.

It is important that individuals who are working two or more jobs and single parents have the opportunity to vote. It is important that people who do not drive or do not have transportation are allowed to vote. It is important that people who due to bad luck or injustice, were caught up in the criminal justice system be allowed to vote. We oppose any type of hurdle that might be employed to prevent any category of citizen from voting.

Choosing through our vote, the people who represent us, is a citizen's right. We can build a stronger and more equitable state by ensuring all citizens are engaged and able to vote in State, Local and Federal elections.

We thank you for supporting these important American principals. We thank you for ensuring citizens voices are heard through their vote.

Brenda and Ralph McGahagin

Michelle Augustine

self

Georgetown, TX

I'm concerned about any legislation that suppresses voters. I support efforts to maintain early voting .that includes operating in the evenings on or weekends. I support having polling sites located in our lower economic areas, as transportation to polling sites can be an issue - these residents deserve to be able to exercise their right to vote. If reducing costs is an objective, then I support extending opportunities for Mail-in Ballots to all ages and having access to Ballot Box drop sites. As a tech-savvy senior citizen, I found it difficult this past year to apply online and to acquire a mail-in ballot -- which I never did receive. It seems to me that some tactics being used are the cry of "voter fraud" as a guise to suppress voting opportunities. Yet, research and Texas county clerks have shown facts, that all across Texas, there has been a minuscule amount of voter fraud. I fear Texas is reverting backwards to "Jim Crow" ways; I'd rather see Texas be a beacon of progress.

Rebecca Wells

Self, health services researo

Houston, TX

Please make it as easy as possible for people to vote. This is essential to democracy.

Jacquelyn Scherer, Dr.

UTSA

San Antonio, TX

It is vital for our democracy that the greatest number of eligible voters be allowed and encouraged to cast a ballot in the least restrictive way. Only then will we have a truly representative government. It is not important which political party is favored or disadvantaged. If the party platforms and candidates keep the public good in mind, the will of the people will prevail.

Mary Harwood, Mrs.

Self - retired

Round Top, TX

I have worked at the polls for several years and never seen anything being done that is illegal or sneaky. In fact I have been very impressed with the security of our voting system. I have also voted by mail for a few years and find it very useful now that it gets more difficult for me to get to the polls. I urge you to protect our right to vote by mail. I don't think a drive-through poll would work very well, knowing how much checking the voting clerks must do to assure the voter is who she says she is and is registered. Let's make it easier to register! Let's protect the elderly and handicapped!

Marty Hoag, TX Citizen

Self

North Richland Hills, TX

Make Texas democratic elections easy, fair and safe: Register to vote online. Easy mail in ballots for everyone. Numerous easy to access voting centers. Online tracking for mail in ballots. Fair treatment of VDRs. Fair voting maps not gerrymandered districts. New safe voting machines with paper trails. No more voter suppression! Every vote counts!

Julie Strother, Mrs

Self

Houston, TX

As a voting citizen of Texas, I strongly urge you to increase the ease in regard to how voting is done. This can be done in a number of ways. There should be an increase in online voter registration opportunities. There also needs to be a no excuse mail in ballot option. There also needs to be a robust tracking system so that a voter is assured that their mail in ballot was received and counted. The pandemic has proven why this is needed. There should be many secure drop boxes, and many more than 1 per county. Having only 1 in Harris County does not help Texans participate in a democratic Republic. New and inventive ways to vote, like drive through voting, must be allowed and increased. Volunteer voter registrars must continue to be allowed to assist with registering new and former voters. Early voting must be kept and increased in length. Proposals that in any way target black and brown communities, whether intentional or not, must not be approved. Polling locations must not be reduced in minority communities. Being able to vote at any polling location in your county can help reduce lines.

Our system of government is a representative democracy. This mandates that voters elect officials. Voters must be given every opportunity to vote. Anything less is unpatriotic and inconsistent with the values that this country and state hold dear. Any proposed laws that restrict access to voting go against what this country stands for.

James Slattery

Texas Civil Rights Project

AUSTIN, TX

As the Committee begins its work this Session with a briefing from the Secretary of State, we write to suggest the priorities that should guide the Committee and the Secretary in the work ahead. For many years, the focus of Texas election policy has been on “voter fraud,” imposing a series of increasingly onerous restrictions on voting under the rubric of “election integrity.” These measures have not made our elections more secure, but have made Texas one of the hardest places to vote in the country.

Further, a rigid focus on measures against “voter fraud” to the exclusion of nearly anything else has left Texas’s voting infrastructure to rot. Every election season, Texas makes national headlines for some new catastrophe that has befallen voters, particularly people of color. For instance, during the March 2020 Primary Election, a “perfect storm” of closed polling places, an insufficient number of voting machines that are also well past the end of their lifespan, and poll worker shortages created lines of

up to six hours at the polls. In 2016 and 2018, voting machines using an outdated interface appeared to “flip” votes from one candidate to another in the leading statewide races of those years.

The coronavirus pandemic only exacerbated these growing problems, requiring Texans to continue to use an archaic paper-based voter registration system that relies on close (and now dangerous) person-person contact. Texas’s restrictive vote by mail laws as interpreted by the Texas Supreme Court mandated that the vast majority of Texans vote in person rather than safely from home. Our election laws forced voters to make a terrifying choice in 2020--between their health and their right to vote--that no Texan should ever have to make again.

The time is ripe for the Committee and the Secretary to spend this Session working together to modernize Texas’s election infrastructure, remove unnecessary barriers to voting, and protect voters against threats to public health. There are a number of policies that have been implemented elsewhere successfully for years that would address many of these problems, including: online voter registration; vote by mail for all Texas voters; making permanent Gov. Abbott’s orders that extended early voting by a week and allowed in-person drop offs of mail ballots before Election Day; allowing voters to check the status of their mail ballot online; and giving voters the opportunity to correct problems with their mail ballot before they’re rejected.

Voting is a fundamental right, not a privilege, that must be easily accessible to all who are eligible. We urge the Secretary to propose and support such reforms to the Committee this Session in order to protect the right to vote of all of our citizens, and rebuild and modernize our state’s crumbling election infrastructure.

Frederick Lewis, MR

Self

San Antonio, TX

I expect elections to be easier to navigate. I expect my voting experience to change-making things easier to vote? Texas citizens should be able to vote by mail, and register and track their mail-in ballots online. The Secretary of States Elections Website and IT infrastructure should be upgraded by a factor of 100X. If we can do drive-through chicken sandwiches and distribution sites then why can't we vote my mail in the polls? I expect you to do your job and help Texas citizens gain access, NOT RESTRICT access to voting.

Georgia Keysor

Self - Retired

Austin, TX

As a volunteer, I assisted folks in the vote by mail process. While it's somewhat cumbersome in its application, the written request system provides important documentation and oversight to prevent fraud because the gate keeper is the local elected Clerk of Court. Expanding the current system to all voters would allow all voters to take part in this process without opening up the system to fraud or abuse. We know that the allegations of massive voter fraud is nothing but a big lie that Republicans dust off every time an election does not go their way or too many people of color cast ballots. I trust my local elected officials, including my Clerk of Court, to administer elections fairly and openly, and according to law, just like they did in 2020 and every year prior. I urge all committee members to support HB583 and HB802.

Reuben Leslie

12203 Antoinette place

Austin, TX

As a first-time vote-by-mail voter in the 2020 elections, I want to thank Travis County Elections Division and the Texas Secretary of State for a smooth and clear, though elaborate, processing of my votes. I hope more voters who are elderly, have disabilities, or

have family and work obligations keeping them from in-person voting can continue to vote this way, and I hope all voters who fear pandemic disease transmission can also be clearly allowed to vote by mail.

Kirk Pate, n/a

Self

Flatonia, TX

Please explain why an age-eligible registered voters must re-submit annually an application to vote by mail? When once age eligible to vote by mail, as I am, why would there not be a statute that affords life-time eligibility to vote by mail once initially so qualified by age? Such a statute would also enable movers to other Texas counties to transfer that life-time eligibility with them.

Marcelle Rhodes

Self

The Woodlands, TX

Please allow deputy voter registrars to keep assisting in registering voters. This is a community service that helps our whole state. We live in a democracy and voting should be encouraged and facilitated-- please keep that in mind and don't make registration harder for our citizens.
